

DIAMOND DICK JR.

A WEEKLY LIBRARY

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December 5, 1896.

Vol. 1. No. 8.

Price Five Cents.



AS THE BOAT STRUCK THE ROCK IT CAPSIZED THROWING THE TWO MEN INTO THE TORRENT.

Diamond Dick, Jr.

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Diamond Dick, Jr.'s Daring Drift; OR, UNDER WATER THROUGH DEVIL'S GULCH

BY W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

A RED-HOT RUCTION.

"What proof have you that this man is guilty?"

The voice rang out clear and sharp above the babel, and there was a momentary stay of proceedings.

"What proof have we got?" repeated David Gibbons, mayor of the town of Tulip, a nascent "burg," in the foothills of the Sierra Madre, in one of the wildest parts of New Mexico.

"That is what I asked you, sir," and the eyes of Diamond Dick, Jr., met those of the big, burly, and bewhiskered mayor fearlessly.

It is night in this town of Tulip, and the scene is laid in the "Cosmopolitan" saloon.

Bertie had leaped upon a table, and every eye was centred upon him.

In the midst of the throng of wild-eyed men was a prisoner, and the expressed intention of the crowd was to take him out and lynch him.

"We have got all the proof we want, that's what we have got," the mayor retorted. "Whar's his two pards that went out with him to search fer that ton of gold?"

"Does he not give you his word that

they were killed by the Apaches? And does not his appearance attest to the hardships he has passed through?"

"That be darned! They found the ton of gold, that's what's the matter, and this hyer hog, in order to have it all himself, has put his two pards out of the way. But we'll fix him, your bet!"

"You bet we will!" roared the crowd. "Hold!"

The command was given in stern tones.

Bertie had whipped out his brace of guns, and now he covered the mayor with them.

The murmur that ran through that crowd meant peril for Diamond Dick, Jr., but he never flinched. It was like the suppressed roar of a lion.

"Wull, what?" demanded the mayor, pausing and looking back.

"That man shall not be hanged until he has had a fair trial, not if I can prevent."

"You? Ha, ha, ha! Why, you fancy whipper-snapper, you, we will take you out and hang you along with him, if you ain't civil!"

"That's what!" approved the crowd.

"And if you do not comply with my demand you will never pass that door a living man," Bertie gave warning.

His weapons were aimed straight at the mayor's heart, and David Gibbons

turned pale as he saw the flash of the keen eyes just behind the threatening tubes.

"Here you are taking a man out to hang him upon a mere supposition hatched in your own brain," Diamond Dick, Jr., continued, "without giving him half a chance to defend himself. And he is more than half dead, already, from hardship and exposure."

"Well, what business is that of yours, anyhow?" roared the mayor. "I reckon to opine that I am boss of these hyer diggins, not you!"

"Then show yourself a man and give this poor devil a chance!"

"But we have found him guilty, durn et!"

"And I have heard him declare that he is innocent, and beg for his life, and a chance to defend himself and prove what he asserts. I happened in here just in time to hear him implore some one to interpose in his behalf, and that was where I chipped in. I say that man has got to have a square deal, or the game don't go on!"

"Look hyer, who the mischief are you, anyhow?"

"Men call me Diamond Dick, Jr., where I am best known, a name that I am not ashamed of."

"And you think that you are goin' to take hold of the lines and run this hyer town to suit your ideas, do ye? We'll see about that!"

"For God's sake, spare that man! He is my brother!"

It was a woman's cry.

A dark-faced, rather good-looking young woman was striving to push her way through the throng in the direction of where the prisoner was held.

She was clad in semi-Mexican garb, with the usual short skirt. Her feet were incased in a pair of American-make shoes, stout and serviceable, and her legs in Indian leggings.

She bore resemblance to the prisoner, in that both were dark, but he was so thin and gaunt that it could hardly be carried further.

"How came she here?" thundered David Gibbons.

"I am here to beg my brother's life," the young woman cried. "They came to my cabin, where he was sick in bed, and

where I was nursing him, and tore him away from me to hang him! Oh, sir!" turning to Diamond Dick, Jr., "defend him with your life, for my sake!"

"That's what I'm here for," said Bertie, as cool as ice. "He don't go up unless I first go down."

"Then you'll go down!" cried the mayor.

"And you," said Bertie.

Not for an instant did he remove the bead he had drawn upon the mayor's breast.

"David Gibbons, spare his life," the young woman pleaded. "Spare him, and I will marry you. I will become your wife as you have desired."

"You will do that?" eagerly.

"No, she never shall!"

The voice was that of the prisoner, and though weak, it rang out high and sharp in the now silent room.

"For your sake, Henry," said the girl, in despair.

"No, not for my sake. My miserable life is not worthy the sacrifice. It shall never be!"

"But your life is dear to me——"

"It is mine, not yours, and I will not accept it at such a cost. No, no, let them do their worst with me; my days are few, anyhow; but you—never, never marry David Gibbons!"

The girl turned an appealing glance upon Diamond Dick, Jr., tears streaming from her handsome eyes.

"I have only one request to make," said the prisoner, further, "then let them do their worst. I am innocent, but I can die but once."

"What is it, brother?" cried the girl, looking again in his direction.

"Diamond Dick, Jr., it is to you," the prisoner addressed Bertie. "I have one dying favor to ask."

"You are not dying yet," said Bertie, with eyes glued to the man he held under cover, "but make it if you want to, and if it be anything in my power I will grant it."

"It is this: Be a brother to my sister, in my stead, when I am gone. She has no one, no one, in all the world, but me——"

"And me!"

Another voice, strong, sturdy, near a

window, close by the table on which Diamond Dick, Jr., was standing.

Bertie did not dare glance in that direction, for he knew that the removal of his fixed gaze for one instant from the enraged mayor of the town might cost the advantage he held.

"Infernio!" grated David Gibbons, as his eyes turned in that direction.

"Yes, and you," the prisoner added, quickly. "Thank God you are here, to lend her protection, Elmer."

"But what is the matter here?" demanded the man at the window. "You are not going to hang Henry Naylor, Dave Gibbons? Are you mad?"

"That is what we are," growled the mayor. "We are mad through and through, fer it is a plain case, and we are not goin' to let him live another hour. He has got to die!"

"But the charge, what is the charge?"

"It is murder!"

"Henry Naylor a murderer? Never! Henry, what have you to say to all this?"

"That I am innocent, as innocent as you are, Elmer. But I am too weak to talk; I cannot defend myself. Let them do their worst and then avenge me upon them."

"No, this shall not be; it shall not go on!"

There was a quick scramble, the man was in through the window in a trice, and the next instant he was up onto the same table with Diamond Dick, Jr.

"You are in a dangerous place here," Bertie said to him, in low tone, but without removing his eyes from his man.

"No more so than yourself," was the response.

There was no time to say more, and scant time for even that.

All that has been quoted and described had taken place in two minutes' time.

With a rope around his neck, with half a dozen heavy hands on his person, the prisoner's life hung in the balance.

The young woman was wringing her hands, and her gaze was now fixed upon this new-comer, who had no sooner responded to Bertie than he called aloud to the mayor:

"You say Henry Naylor is a murderer; who has he killed?"

"Who but his pards, Ben Wilson and

Dan Long, that went with him to hunt for the ton of gold!"

"What proof have you of that?"

"Proof? Why, durn et, don't it stand to reason? Wasn't they jist as good men as him, and wouldn't they stand jist as much chance of comin' back hyer alive?"

"That's it?" roared the crowd. "What proof kin he show that he didn't do it?"

"That's ther question!"

"Hang him!"

"That's right! Hooray!"

Of a sudden there was a great shock to the table on which Diamond Dick, Jr., and his lone backer were standing, and down they came, with a crash, to the floor.

The young woman uttered a piercing shriek at the same moment, the loud voice of the mayor was heard in laughter, there was one wild, hoarse shout, and the rough denizens of Tulip rushed wildly out of doors, carrying their prisoner with them.

CHAPTER II.

THE HANGING AND A DEFIANCE.

Out rushed the maddened throng, and the night was made hideous with their cries.

Having decided that Henry Naylor should be hanged, they were for the time being insane with desire for his life, and hardly accountable, as a whole, for their mad act.

The one man responsible, more than any other, was David Gibbons, the mayor.

He was actuated by more than a desire for justice.

"Where to?" cried the men who had the prisoner in charge. "Where to, Gibbons?"

"To that tree thar by the creek, and yank him up to it jist as quick as ye can, too!" the mayor ordered.

Away they went, with whoop and yell, and away went the crowd after them, pell-mell, all shouting like demons of darkness.

Some few of them had brought torches hurriedly improvised, and the red flare of these made the scene one never to be forgotten.

Reaching the tree, the rope was quickly thrown over a limb, and no less than a score of hands seized the rope and pulled with their might.

The prisoner was jerked clear of the ground and carried to the limb with a rush, where the stop was so sudden that the rope broke, and he dropped to the ground, a distance of not less than sixteen feet.

"Try et again!" some one in the mob shouted.

"Yes, finish the job!" cried another.

"That's what, you bet!"

Their victim was already dead; the impact had broken his neck.

But what cared they for that? They were beside themselves, they were drunk with desire for a life.

Again the rope was adjusted, again thrown over the limb, and this time a little less force was exerted in the hanging.

As the body rose and swayed in air the crack of revolvers began to punctuate the rough jests that were being uttered on every hand, and the body was riddled with bullets.

Meanwhile, what of Diamond Dick, Jr., and the man who had attempted to stand by him?

Bertie tried to save himself as the table went down, but it was of no use, so quick and unexpected was the shock.

Down he went, and down went the other man squarely on top of him, and, for the moment, Bertie was knocked speechless, if not indeed senseless.

And no sooner down, scarcely, than a knee was on Bertie's breast and a pistol was pressed against his head.

"*Cascaras!*" was the exclamation, in Spanish, hissed close to his ear. "If you move you are a dead man!"

This was said in English, but with a strong accent.

Others had, at the same time, seized the man who had come to Bertie's assistance, and both were helpless for the time being.

And high above all could be heard the piercing shrieks of the sister of the doomed man, as she ran up and down the room, wringing her hands and almost beside herself with frenzy.

The uselessness of resistance was apparent to Diamond Dick, Jr., as soon as he could gather his wits together after the fall.

His own life would pay the forfeit if he did resist.

The burning eyes that bent above him told him that, and by this time it was too late, even had he been gifted with the power of a hundred men.

The mad shouting of the mob came to his ears, then the fusillades of pistol shots, and the young woman uttered one last despairing cry, and fell to the floor in a faint.

"Well, it is all over," said Bertie, "so you may as well let me up. I can't do the poor fellow any good now."

"*Precaber!*" cried the fellow who had Bertie foul. "If you make any more trouble here, you will follow him. Take warning."

The other man had ceased to struggle.

Now, however, seeing a possible chance, he began again, and one of the men who had been holding him was hurled backward against the Mexican, who was kneeling on Diamond Dick, Jr.'s breast.

Bertie took advantage of it instantly.

Exerting all his strength, he hurled the fellow off, and was upon his feet quickly, with his guns ready for action.

The saloon was almost deserted now.

None were left save the Mexican who had fouled Diamond Dick, Jr., and the two men who had pounced upon Bertie's assistant.

"Steady!" Bertie cried, as he saw them reaching for their guns. "I will drop the first man of you that tries to pull a pop. Let go there, you dog, or down you go!"

This to the one who was still trying to hold the new-comer down.

He took the warning, and the new-comer was quickly up and had his weapons in hand the same as Bertie.

"Juan Domingo," he cried, "I am tempted to end your miserable life here and now, for the cowardly part you have played this night!"

"Take care!" he was cautioned. "You can do it, but what would your life be worth afterward? You would be hanged within the minute, and riddled with bullets!"

"He is right," whispered Bertie. "Quick, save the girl and let us retreat."

"Yes, you are right."

"Hold! Elmer Stanley."

It was the voice of Dave Gibbons, as he sprang in at the door.

"You touch that gal at you peril!" the mayor added. "She belongs to me, not to you."

"And you throw up your hands," shouted Bertie, "or I will plant a bullet so squarely between your eyes you will never feel it!"

Gibbons was just in the act of drawing a gun, but this deterred him for a second, and in that second he lost the chance he might have had for a snap shot at one of them.

"Curse it! you?" he grated.

"As you see," answered Bertie, still as cool as ever. "Quick, Stanley, now is your chance!"

Diamond Dick, Jr., held the four covered with his revolvers, and Elmer Stanley sprang forward and snatched the insensible girl up in his arms.

"Out the rear way," Bertie directed. "I will cover your retreat and you will have a few minutes' grace."

"And I'll owe you an obligation I can't repay," was the response, as he took the advice and ran for the door.

"Never mind about that," Bertie called after him.

Stanley was out and away, and Diamond Dick, Jr., held the mayor and the others at bay.

"Curse you! but you shall answer for this!" the mayor cried.

"I expect to," was the defiant return.

"And you will wish you had never been born!"

"I am taking my chances of that. Don't you move or you will be just as badly off as if you hadn't ever been born. I don't want to spill any blood here in your camp, but if you force me to it I won't hesitate about it."

And he meant just what he said.

He had a corner, and evidently he knew how to keep it. For the time being he was boss of the situation.

And there was no chance for the same mishap occurring a second time.

They had hurled the table from under him before, but it would be impossible for them to jerk the saloon from under his feet.

By this time the mob was heard returning from their "hanging-bee."

"What is the use of your 'posin' me hyer?" asked the mayor. "You seen how we hanged that chap, in spite of ye."

"Well, there is no use of it, now," said Bertie. "I am willing to call quits, if you are, but you don't want to think that you can dump me if I agree to a truce."

"Then put up yer gun."

"No, wait till the crowd comes in, and then you can tell them just how it is, and it will be my treat."

"All right, I'll do that, fer you are clean beat, we hanged him in spite of ye. Hyer they come, and I'll hold ye to yer word to treat ther gang."

"My word is my bond," said Bertie.

"Hello!" cried the foremost of the mob, stopping short. "What's this hyer?"

"Your mayor and I are only having a little stand-off," answered Diamond Dick, Jr. "He will tell you about it."

"It is to be all right, now that we have got the best of the rooster and finished our job," said the mayor. "We are to call et off, and he is to treat the crowd."

"Hooray! Bully fer the bantam!"

"Waltz right up and take your swill," said Bertie. "It is my treat, and we are to bury the hatchet."

There was a rousing cheer at that, the word was passed from lip to lip, as others came in, and there was a surging throng around the bar in no time.

Bertie was playing a double hand, so to say.

Not only was he gaining time for his friend, Stanley, in which to enable him to get safely away with the girl, but he was ingratiating himself in the favor of the rough denizens of the "burg."

He had an eye out for Gibbons and the Mexican, on the sly.

In a few moments, he saw them together, talking earnestly, and saw that every now and again their glances shot his way.

But he paid no attention to them, seemingly.

He had tossed a couple of coins to the man at the bar, and the crowd was busy.

Presently he saw the Mexican moving his way, and Diamond Dick, Jr., rightly guessed that trouble was brewing for him.

He was all alone there, so far as help was concerned, and he felt of his guns, to

ascertain that they were in proper condition for further business, if needed.

Finding that they were, and that they could leap to his grasp as quick as a wink, if necessary, he struck an easy pose, and waited for Mr. Juan Domingo to come forward and declare himself. And the Mexican was coming, with an easy swing.

CHAPTER III.

DISPLAY OF NERVE AND MUSCLE.

As the Mexican approached, he held out his hand to Bertie.

"What!" he exclaimed, "you do not drink anything? That is not doing honor to yourself."

"I seldom drink," said Bertie, letting the fellow take his hand, and he instantly saw that he did not mean to let go of it immediately.

"You don't drink?" shaking the hand with undue warmth. "*Milagro!* is it possible? But you do not mean, senor, that you never drink. If not on your own treat, you will drink with me?"

"Nit! I have too much regard for sound muscle and steady nerve to tamper with such lightning or forty-rod."

"But you are going to drink with me!"

It had all taken place in less than half a minute, and the Mexican evidently believed that he had Bertie's right hand in limbo.

As he spoke he closed down even tighter upon that member, and with his own left hand pulled a gun from his belt, but he was not half quick enough for the man he had thought to overcome.

Diamond Dick, Jr.'s hand closed upon that of the Mexican like an instrument of torture, so strong was his grip, and at the same instant his left seized the left wrist of the Mexican and the pistol was sent flying over the heads of the crowd.

The Mexican was howling with pain, for Bertie was twisting his arms without mercy, big fellow though Domingo was.

"Durnation!" cried one fellow, who was just leaving the bar. "What does this hyer mean?"

"It means that this chap is my muton," cried the mayor, who had by this time pushed his way to where the two stood grappled.

As he spoke, he seized Bertie by the shoulder and drew a gun.

Spat!

Quicker than a wink, Bertie had dropped the Mexican, and his right fist took the big, burly mayor squarely in the mouth.

Over went Mr. Gibbons, sliding under a table flat on his back, and the Mexican was powerless for the moment to play further his little part, owing to the pain in his arms.

He was swearing in Spanish at a terrific rate.

"There is treachery for you, my friends," cried Bertie, appealing to the crowd.

"That's what's the matter," some of those around him shouted.

"I had agreed to terms of peace, you were enjoying my treat; seeing that I had played a losing hand, and here your mayor and his Mexican sneak tried to take me unawares."

"We'll have none of that," several of the rough fellows called out as one man. "Mayor, we'll have none of that!"

"You want to hang that fellow!" the mayor roared.

"Nary hang, Gibbons. He's all right; he is the stuff, you bet!"

"Bet yer life he is!" supported others, and Bertie saw that he had plenty of backers now.

He set sail accordingly.

"That was hardly a fair deal, mayor," he said, "after I met you more than half way for peace, but, still, I'll let it drop if you are willing. What do you say?"

"I'll see you later, curse you," Gibbons growled, savagely.

"All right, just as you please. And how is it with you, Domingo? I guess you thought you had got hold of a giant electric battery, didn't you? When you tackle me you want to do it when I am asleep. See? Ta-ta!"

Bertie had been edging toward a window, while speaking, and as he concluded he vaulted lightly out and was gone.

He was under cover of the friendly shadows almost instantly.

"Whew! but that was a hornet's nest," he said to himself. "I never thought I would come out of that den with a whole skin, yet here I am. It is war to the

teeth, now, however, and I must get on a gait and make ready for the fray."

He hastened away among the darkened shanties and wickiups, wondering where he would fall in again with Stanley.

Presently he saw one shanty where there was a light.

He went to that.

Peering in through a chink, he saw the same young woman sitting on a low stool rocking herself to and fro and moaning.

Stanley was not there, and, in an instant, it flashed to Bertie's mind where he must be.

He tapped at the door lightly.

The young woman was upon her feet instantly.

"Who is there?" she asked.

"It is I, your friend of the saloon," answered Bertie.

"I am afraid to open the door to you," she said.

"Why are you afraid?" he inquired.

"I am afraid that it may be some one trying to deceive me."

"Well, well, you are a girl of caution, anyway. But where is your friend Stanley?"

"He has gone to get some friends and rescue Diamond Dick."

"I thought so. Well, I will go and look him up, and then will come back with him. You will know his voice when he comes."

"And I will open the door to you, for now I recognize yours."

"No, no, never mind, for I must go and look up your friend. He may be in need of my aid, by this time, instead of I in need of his. Keep your door barred till we come."

"I intend to do that." And then, in lower tone, "oh, my brother, my poor brother!"

Bertie pitied the girl, and resolved that he would aid her in wreaking a just vengeance upon those who had so ruthlessly slain her invalid brother.

He was eager, too, to hear the whole of that matter, for, as yet, he had only an inkling of it.

And then the mention of the "ton of gold," he had heard of that before.

He went back the way he had come, and approached the Cosmopolitan from another direction.

The windows of the saloon were all open, and he stepped to one of these and looked in.

Just as he did so, he saw Elmer Stanley and two others enter by the front door and saw Stanley cast a searching glance around the room.

Bertie stood ready to give him a sign, but before his gaze came that way he was accosted by the mayor.

"Hello! hyer ye are, hey?" the mayor cried.

"Yes, here I am," was Stanley's response.

"Wull, what d'ye want? Air ye lookin' fer satisfaction?"

"I am looking for that young man who tried to prevent your doing that murder."

"Murder! You call thet 'ar a murder?"

"It was nothing short of it, and a most heinous murder, at that," was the fearless rejoinder.

Diamond Dick, Jr., liked the style of Stanley.

Here was proof that he had that quality of intrepidity commonly denominated "sand."

Bertie then and there made up his mind that he would pair with him for the work in hand, if his offer would be accepted.

"Well, you had better hold a civil tongue in yer head," the mayor grated, savagely, "or there may be more trouble of the same sort, hyer, and you may be in et."

"I did not come into quarrel with you, sir, but to look for that brave young fellow."

"Brave? Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you mean?"

"If you had seen him light through that winder over thar a spell ago, ye wouldn't call him brave."

"He was only one against you all."

Stanley was turning to go when he caught sight of Bertie, and received a signal.

Bertie disappeared from the window at once, and passed around near the front and waited, and after a word or two more with Gibbons, Stanley came out and joined him, being joined by two others, who had just come up.

"Give me your hand," Stanley cried, as he came up. "I owe you a debt of gratitude."

"And the quickest way to pay it is to agree not to mention it again," said Bertie, as they shook hands.

"I will not promise that. So you are Daimond Dick, Jr?"

"That is my handle, Mr. Stanley."

"I have heard of you. Let me introduce two trusted pards of mine, Mort Briscow and Zach Temple."

"Pleased to know you, gentlemen," said Bertie, shaking hands with each in turn. "So, you were out looking for me, eh? I had skedadled to go look for you."

"But you didn't run away, I'll bet on that; you are not that kind."

"Not exactly," declared Bertie. "You see I had another hook-up with the mayor and that Mexican black-and-tan of his, and after I had broken that I thought it was about time for me to dust out. But where are you going?"

"To Lenora's cabin—that is, Miss Naylor's; that is her name."

"I have just been there, that is how I knew you were looking for me. Well, lead the way, for I want to have a chat with you and her."

"All right, come along. Will you go, Mort and Zach?"

"No, I guess you don't need us any more," answered Mort. "If ye want us, though, you know where to find us."

"And you won't have to call twice, either," added Zach.

"All right, and good night to you boys."

"Good-night, Stanley."

They went off, and Stanley led the way to the Naylor cabin.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LEGEND OF THE TON OF GOLD.

Arriving at their destination, Stanley gave a signal knock on the door, and it was immediately opened to them.

The girl's eyes were red with weeping, and she asked, immediately:

"Did they do it, Elmer, did they——" But his look was the answer, and he took her to his breast as she burst out sobbing afresh.

"There, there," he said, soothingly, "do not take it so hard, Lenora. Henry is past all suffering now, and is, perhaps, better off than any of us here."

"I know, I know," she sobbed; "but

to think that he was innocent, that they came and dragged him from his sick bed, and that they—they hanged him! Oh! it was terrible, it was terrible!"

"Yes, it was indeed terrible, but they shall answer for it if there is a God in Heaven!"

Stanley spoke with intense earnestness.

"Yes, yes," cried the girl, looking up and lifting her hand above her head. "Before high Heaven I vow that he shall be avenged, even at the cost of my own life!"

"Yes, I swear it," said Stanley.

"And you can just count me into this thing," said Bertie. "Here is a hand to each of you on it. I will give you my aid till the matter is brought to a finish, if you will accept the offer."

"Yes, yes, for I know you are true," said the girl, clinging to the hand he gave her. "You tried to save him, you would have saved him, but you were only one against so many. Oh! the wretch! I can never be happy till my own hand has plunged a knife into the heart of Dave Gibbons!"

Bertie was surprised at so much decision in the girl. It was plain that the mayor of Tulip had a foe of whom he might, with reason, stand in awe.

"Well, let's sit down," Bertie suggested. "I want to talk this thing over and get a better understanding of it."

They took seats.

"Now, just why did David Gibbons want to hang your brother, Miss Naylor?" he inquired.

"One reason, because he loved me and hated Henry for protecting me from his attentions. And then, because Henry would not tell him the secret of the ton of gold."

"Let me have the particulars of that, will you, please?"

"Certainly, as I must, if you are going to aid me in my vengeance against that wretch."

"You have heard what my determination is."

"Yes, yes, and I cannot doubt you. You have heard of the ton of gold before?"

"Yes."

"It is an old story, one that is well known among miners and prospectors."

"Yes, and more men than one have sacrificed their lives in trying to rediscover the bonanza. But let us hear it your own way, Miss Naylor."

"The story, as my poor brother heard it, was this: Long ago some Mexican prospectors set out from Santa Fe to explore some of the wildest portions of the San Jan Mountains.

"Somewhere away up in the heart of these mountains, they discovered a cave, and in that cave a wonderful wealth in pure gold. They had already gathered up a hundred pounds or more of nuggets, and were ready to return, when the cave and its treasure were discovered unexpectedly.

"Only one of those Mexicans returned alive, the same as my poor brother was the only one of his party who lived to tell the tale. He described the cave as large enough to hold a hundred persons, and said that several skeletons, with some cooking utensils and Indian weapons, were found on the floor. At the rear of the cave was the ton of gold.

"It was all in pure nuggets, of every size and shape, he said, and must have weighed a ton at the very least. He brought back in proof of it several nuggets that weighed nearly a pound each, and his story was believed in every particular. Prospectors went wild, and they only waited for the lone survivor of the party to gain strength to lead them back to the wonderful cave. But that he never did. The hardships and privations through which he had passed had been too severe, and he died.

"Well, when my poor brother heard this story, nothing could dissuade him from undertaking to rediscover that cave and its great treasure. He found two men who were willing to accompany him, Ben Wilson and Dan Long, by name, and they set upon their perilous mission."

"And it is of their adventures and achievements that I am particularly anxious to hear," said Bertie. "I have heard all the rest before, substantially as you have told it now."

"There is little to tell, sir. My brother left me in the care of an old half-caste squaw, who died while he was gone, and with the men I have named set out upon his dangerous expedition. When he re-

turned he came alone, and he was more dead than alive, and nearly out of his mind.

"Meantime, Dave Gibbons had begun paying attentions to me, and I was keeping him at a distance the best I could, hoping that each coming day would witness my brother's arrival. When he did come, he had hot words with Gibbons, and forbade him the cabin, even though Gibbons tried to make peace with him. I think my brother must have known some terrible secret of his——"

"That would account for his determination to hang him, then," Bertie interrupted.

"Yes, I think so," agreed Stanley, "together with his love for Miss Naylor and his chagrin at not being able to get the secret of the mountain cave and the ton of gold from Henry."

"He tried hard to get that secret," the young woman continued, "and all the harder when it became apparent that my brother was not likely ever to get well. But Henry would not yield, and so Gibbons began to threaten. Then, at last, he made accusations.

"He threw out dark hints that my brother must have murdered his two companions, in order to have all the wealth for himself, and so wrought upon the minds of the people that, finally, he made them think as he wanted them to think, and then came the terrible tragedy you know all about. Only an hour before it happened he was here for the last time, and was for the last time denied and refused, and he went away with terrible threats on his tongue."

"The scoundrel!" cried Bertie. "He deserves the worst fate that we can bring upon him."

"And that is the fate he shall have," declared Stanley.

"That is my vow," said Lenora.

"But, Miss Naylor," said Bertie, "you have not told us all."

"Yes, that is all, sir."

"How is that? Your brother must have told you, privately, more than he would tell any one else."

"Oh, now I understand. Yes, he did tell me many things, but I fear thy are of little moment, now that he is gone. Oh,

if he could only have lived and got well —"

"Since he did not, you have a duty to perform, a duty that you owe to yourself."

"The duty of vengeance."

"More than that. The duty of claiming this gold that was rightfully your brother's."

"His, and his companions'. Henry said that if he was ever able to go back and get it, their people should have the share of it that would have rightfully been theirs."

"And yet this scoundrel could say that he had murdered them."

"Which he never did, sir. If you could have seen how he mourned for them. They had become like brothers, and on two occasions they saved my brother's life."

"Well, what information did he leave with you? Surely he told you the location of that wonderful cavern?"

"Yes, yes, he did, he did; but, can I remember what he said?"

"If he had only drawn a plan——"

The girl was instantly on her feet.

"What is it?" asked Bertie and Stanley as one, their hands dropping to their guns.

"The map!"

"What map?"

"The map he drew."

"Then there was a map?" asked Bertie.

"Yes, yes, he drew it at times, as he was able, and he had it on his person!"

"Then that map must be recovered, if not too late," said Bertie. "I take it that he had it in one of his pockets?"

"Yes, yes. You see, he would not lay off his clothes for good; he would not admit how sick he was; the map was in the inside pocket of his vest the last I knew of it."

"And you did not think of it——"

"Not till you said what you did, and reminded me of it."

"I will go out and find it," said Bertie, "if it has not already fallen into the hands of Gibbons."

"And if it has," suggested Stanley.

"If it has, we must have it anyhow. But if he knew nothing about it I may find it on the body."

"And I am going with you," said Lenora.

"You take a needless risk," said Bertie.

"I will return to you at once."

"You forget that I have not seen my brother since—since it happened, and that he must be given decent burial. Besides, that will be our excuse; we have come to bury him."

"Let me go in your stead," said Stanley. "We will bring the body here to you."

"But I want to go."

"Think of the sight, think of the shock it will be to you, Lenora."

"Yes, yes, I think of all that, and still I say I want to go, I must go. I must see and know the worst, that my hand may not lack courage when the hour of vengeance comes."

"Very well, we will not oppose you further, we will all go together and bring the body here. They have done their worst and can have no further use for it now. We were not able to prevent the crime, but you know we did all in our power."

CHAPTER V.

CUTTHROATS EXCHANGE CONFIDENCES.

Meantime, David Gibbons had not been altogether idle.

He had just entered into a private discussion with the Mexican, Juan Domingo, when Elmer Stanley entered the Cosmopolitan.

After Stanley's departure that discussion was resumed.

"*Diablo!*" exclaimed the Mexican. "Then you really intend to hunt for that ton of gold?"

"Really intend it? That has been my scheme all along, and I want you to go with me. What do you say to that, my gallus cavalier?"

"*Por Dios!* I say that I am with you, heart and soul," was the prompt response.

"But, we cannot go alone, us two; we must have a company, picked and trusted followers."

"And they are to be had, all we want of them. Juan, that ton of gold is ours!"

"Yes, it is ours—all ours!" cried the Mexican.

"You will go with me, for I may have need of one who can talk your tongue, and when we discover the treasure a quarter of it shall be yours."

"Then you will not give me half?"

"Do you demand half?"

"Am I not to take half the toil and danger, senor?"

"Well, a half, then, my dear Juan. Even that will be more than we can spend in a lifetime."

"*Por Dios!* yes!"

"And we will lose no time about it, either."

"When do we start?"

"Just as soon as we can make ready."

"But do you know where to go? Did you get anything out of that fellow you hanged?"

"No, cuss him, I didn't. That is, not in life, but I will now. I knew what I was about, you bet."

"What do you mean, senor?"

"I did not pry and spy around that cabin for nothing. There are chinks in the walls, and I have sharp eyes and ears, Juan Domingo."

"Ah-ha!"

"I saw him drawing a map—saw it not only once, but several times, and that map I am going to have. We will cut the body down as soon as we will not attract notice——"

"You think it is on the body?"

"Yes, I have every reason to believe that it is. If not, I know where to find it."

"Where?"

"In the keeping of that wench—— Ha! I must not forget her; what the map may not reveal, she can make up to me, for the fellow must have told her many things."

"But what can you do with her, Senor Gibbons?"

"What can I do with her?"

"Yes, for she will defy and scorn you, and now more than before."

"What can I do with her? I will show you. I am going to have her, in spite of herself!"

"Well, I wish you joy of her, anyhow. If you think you can tame a she wildcat, such as she is likely to prove if you attempt it, go ahead."

"I will tame her or I will kill her!"

"*A mi que me importa;* or, as you say here, I don't care; go ahead, it is your own funeral."

"That is my intention. But, first and foremost, the expedition for the ton of

gold—that has been planned and arranged so that failure will be next to impossible."

"You have counted the risks, senor?"

"Put them against the reward, if success is ours. And it ought to be easy, if that map can be got hold of."

"Ah, the map. We must have that, senor."

"And one other thing, Juan."

"What is that?"

"This fellow who chipped in here to-night—he is a bad block in our way to success, and he must be removed. Do you understand?"

"Si, senor; *yo comprender.*"

"Hang your Spanish! If you savvy say so in plain United States."

"I understand, senor."

"Good enough. He has got to be removed, I say, and that other fellow, too, either now or later on, for my happiness with the wildcat will not be assured while he is in the field."

The Mexican laughed.

"It is nothing to me," he said, with a shrug. "But take care, for I have reason to know that fellow is no child."

"The very reason why he must be removed. And I will not delay about making sure of him, either; I will attend to that, now, at once, before we go any further."

"You yourself, senor? Have a care!"

"My men will do it, and there is the man I want. Ho! Cactus!"

A villainous-looking ruffian looked around on hearing his name called, and rose and came to where Gibbons was seated.

"What yer want, cap'n?" he inquired.

"Is your knife sharp, Cactus?"

The fellow grinned.

"Ef et ain't I kin soon sharpen et," he said.

"Well, see that it is in prime order, for there is a little job I want you to do."

"All right, what is the job?"

"That young rooster that calls himself Diamond Dick, Jr., has got to be sent below."

"Is that all?"

"That is enough, at once, I guess. Can you attend to him?"

"Wull, now I should grin if I couldn't. A bat on the head, a slit in the neck and the thing is done."

"I leave it all to you. If he is not to be found in the morning when the sun rises, nobody will mourn for him. You know what I mean. That is all for the present."

"All right, cap'n."

"And say, Cactus."

"Wull, what?"

"I am not in this, you understand."

"That's all right, cap'n; I understand all 'bout that."

"And if anything slips, and you get caught, don't look to me to get you out."

"I ain't gettin' caught, cap'n."

"That is all right, but if you should. On the other hand, you will wake up some morning with a hundred in your pocket, where you never knew you had it."

The fellow grinned broadly.

"Yer kin trust me," he said.

"Yes, I know I can, or I wouldn't. I have only got to mention——"

"Which yer needn't mention hyer," the fellow quickly interrupted, with a nervous look around. "I am yours to command."

"Yes, I know you are. Well, get out with you now."

Cactus moved away, and rejoined two fellows with whom he had been talking, men as evil in appearance as himself, and they went out.

"You have got a good dog there, senior," said the Mexican.

"And one that knows I hold the whip, too," was the rejoinder.

"You dare trust him, but how is it you dare speak out before me? I am not much less than a stranger to you, yet."

"A stranger to me? Ha, ha! But, yes, you are a stranger, that is to say, you were when you came here. Juan Domingo is not the man who killed Don Escibano——"

In an instant the Mexican was as pale as his swarthy complexion would admit of.

He laid his hand on Gibbons' arm with a frantic clutch.

"*Chito!*" he hissed. "Not a word of that here, you devil! Would you ruin me?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Not at all, my dear fellow," was the reply, "but I want you to see that I pick men with established reputations, when I want work done."

The Mexican looked at him searchingly,

as if he would read his innermost thoughts, but finally shook his head.

In fact, the other had made the better success at that game.

"It is no use, my dear fellow," he said, "you can't penetrate the mask. Just know me for what I am, Dave Gibbons, the mayor of Tulip."

"And you have taken me because you want work done, rather than owing to any friendly regard for me," the Mexican observed.

"As I told you, I take men I can trust. I can trust you, because you dare not betray me."

"And if we are successful, you will keep your word?"

"That you are to have half the find?"

"Yes."

"I will, I promise you that. But first we must get hold of that map—— Come, we will go for it now."

Gibbons rose and led the way out of the saloon.

The Mexican followed him with a troubled look on his dark face, a puzzled expression.

"Enjoyin' yerselves, aire ye, boys?" the mayor saluted, as he passed through the crowd about the bar and door. "Wull, that's right; take a drink to my health while ye are about it."

He tossed a coin to the man behind the bar as he spoke.

He went right out, and the Mexican joined him immediately, and they bent their steps in the direction of the tree where Henry Naylor had been hanged.

As they came near they saw shadowy forms under the tree, the mayor clutched the Mexican's arm as a measure of precaution, and they advanced more silently until they reached the spot.

Those under the tree, needless to say, were Diamond Dick, Jr., with Elmer Stanley and Lenora Naylor. They had just cut the body down, and Bertie was feeling in the pockets for the map. He found it, and drew it forth, but just as he rose to his feet the two men made their presence known.

CHAPTER VI.

SIERRA MADRE CHIPS IN.

"Drop that paper!"

The order was sharp and peremptory.

Gibbons had whispered a word into his companion's ear, and Domingo was ready to back him and share the risks.

With a leap aside, as quickly as the first word of the command had been uttered, Bertie shoved the paper into his pocket and whipped out his pair of guns.

Even in that short time Gibbons had fired, following up his order with a strong argument in its favor, but the bullet missed its mark, and before he could shoot again at Bertie, Stanley had taken a shy at him in the same manner.

It was too dark there under the tree, with only the starlight and the distant rays from the saloon to reveal objects, for any of them to aim with accuracy.

Lenora had uttered a scream at the first shot, and that, with the shooting, drew the attention of the crowd at the saloon.

Out they came, with a rush, to learn what was amiss.

"Curse you! will you drop that paper?" Gibbons shouted again, as he fired another shot.

"That for your answer!"

And the "that" came in the form of another flash and report from the direction of "Little Lightning."

Stanley and Domingo were having it in about the same fashion, and of a sudden a new actor rushed upon the scene, unmindful of the flying bullets.

He could not be seen distinctly.

With a run, he passed between the Mexican and Stanley, and on to the spot where Lenora was standing.

Silently, without a word, he caught the girl up in his arms and continued his flight.

Lenora screamed once, but once only, for the next attempt ended in a muffled sound, her captor having clasped a hand over her mouth.

Stanley sprang in pursuit, the moment he saw what had happened, but he did not dare fire of course.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Stop! or it will be your death!"

There came no response.

At that moment the Mexican fired another shot, and Stanley went to the ground headlong, simultaneously with the flash and report.

The action was quicker than the reader can follow these descriptive words.

Again was the night hideous with whoops and cries, as the wild denizens of Tulip came rushing to the scene.

The mayor and Diamond Dick, Jr., had made yet another exchange of compliments.

The last fire had called forth a second howl from Gibbons.

"All of you after that cuss!" he cried.

"Don't let him get away! I will give a hundred dollars to the man that brings him back here dead or alive! After him!"

There came a laugh of defiance from the direction Bertie had taken, and he was seen no more.

Stanley lay where he had fallen.

Many of the crowd sprang to obey Gibbons' command, eager to finger the reward he had promised.

To the remainder he gave another order to find the missing young woman.

"Which way did she go?" asked one.

"I don't know, I didn't see," said the mayor. "Search and find her; she can't be far off."

"Let's go to her cabin," shouted another. "Ten to one she has dug out fer thar, seein' how ther fight wur a-goin'."

"Yes, that's so."

And off went some more of them in that direction.

"Who is this laid out hyer?" some one else demanded, touching Stanley with his foot.

"It is that fool, Elmer Stanley," answered Gibbons, with a snarl. "I gave him plenty of warning, and he had only himself to blame if he got it."

"*Cascaras!*" shouted Domingo, who just then ran up, having led in the pursuit after Diamond Dick, Jr., for a distance. "We are balked on every hand, Senor Gibbons."

"Yes, but we will soon be on top again, Juan."

"I don't know; the paper gone, and now the girl, too—— Why are you not after her?"

"The boys have gone to her cabin ——"

"To her cabin! Do you not know that she was carried off while we were fighting?"

"The deuce you say!"

"Yes; a man came between us and car-

ried her off just before I laid Stanley out."

"Who was it?"

"*Carramba!* how can I tell you that, dark as it was?"

"Which way did he go?"

"That way."

"Then why did you not go after her, instead of wasting time——"

"*Zamacuco!* Was not the paper of more value than the *mozuela*? Is she worth a ton of gold?"

Curse you! you have more thought for that gold than for my interests! Lead the way in the direction you saw her taken; others will recover the paper."

"Come on."

The Mexican started off in haste, and Gibbons ordered the remainder of the men standing around to follow him.

And don't come back without her, if you value your lives!" he shouted after them.

All were soon lost in the darkness, and the mayor stood there alone.

Curse him! He would have that paper for himself, I believe. I must be watchful of that treacherous cutthroat. Well, you are one out of the way, anyhow," spurning Stanley with his foot. "You were a fool to trust that young devil; he has played you the same trick Domingo would play me."

With more muttered curses he followed in the direction taken by the men who had gone after Bertie.

He had been gone perhaps a minute, when Elmer Stanley moaned and sat up.

Domingo's bullet had had nothing to do with his fall.

At the moment the Mexican fired, Stanley had caught his toe under a projecting splinter of rock, which unquestionably saved him from the bullet, for that shot was at short range.

In falling, his head had come into violent contact with a stone, and he was rendered insensible.

He rubbed his forehead in a dazed manner.

It was some moments before he could recall where he was and what had taken place.

When the recollection came to him it came like a flash, and he staggered to his feet, at first hardly able to stand.

He looked around bewildered.

All alone, the camp apparently asleep or deserted, he knew not how long he had been there in that condition.

Now, hearing voices in the direction of Lenora's cabin, and having her in mind as the first important object of search, he turned that way and staggered forward.

Up the gulch, and also down, he heard the murmur of other voices, and it all served only to bewilder him the more.

He had taken but a few steps when he staggered against two men.

They were coming his way.

"Stanley!" one exclaimed.

"Thank God!" the other.

"We thought you were dead, old man."

"Where—where is she?" Stanley gasped, inquiringly.

"Who?"

"Lenora."

"There is bad news for you, but brace up against it, old fellow. We will aid you to find her."

"Then Gibbons——"

"No, no, not Gibbons, but Sierra Madre Jim."

"Great heavens!"

These two men were Stanley's pard, Briscow and Temple.

"The worst of the pair, if anything," said Briscow, "but don't give up to despair."

"We'll have her, or we'll give our lives tryin' to get her for ye," encouraged Temple. "Brace up against it, old man."

"Thunder!" suddenly cried Briscow, "he's shot!"

"No, no, it was a fall," said Stanley. "I'll be all right soon, pard, and then we have work to do."

"Yes, you are right, we have got work to do," cried Temple, "more than ye figger on, mebbly, old man; but we mean to stand by ye to the end. Come away to our shanty."

"No, no; I must find her."

"That is no use now, if Gibbons and all his gang can't find her——"

"But, in the power of Sierra Madre Jim! My God! we must find her, I cannot rest till she is recovered out of his hands."

"Come with us, Elmer, it is the only thing to be done now. We know his game, and we will play to trump his trick

before he is half done with it, you bet! Come."

They pulled him away in the direction of their shanty, just as the baffled mayor was returning at the head of his band of minions.

Things were assuming dramatic shape there at the town of Tulip.

CHAPTER VII.

BEGINS BERTIE'S DARING DRIFT.

Diamond Dick, Jr.'s last shot at Dave Gibbons was not fired with the good intention of killing that worthy. He might be needed later on, and so the bullet did no fatal damage.

Seeing the mob at hand, and knowing that capture would mean instant hanging, Bertie ran off in the darkness, knowing that he could be of more use to his friends alive than dead.

He had seen the abduction of Lenora and the fall of Stanley.

The latter he believed had been killed.

It was his intention to get on the trail of the man who had run off with the girl, and rescue her or give his life in her defense.

He held sacred the promise he had given Henry Naylor, and resolved that not only would he save Lenora, but that, if possible, he would restore to her the ton of gold her brother had found.

With these thoughts in mind he doubled on his trail by dodging around the first shanty he came to.

Thus his pursuers were thrown off the track.

Having turned, he sped away in the direction the abductor of the girl had taken.

Not far had he gone, yet far enough to be out of immediate earshot of Gibbons and his yelling horde, when he ran headlong into a group of three men.

"Thunderation!" cried one of these. "What have we got hyer?"

Bertie made a move to defend himself, but in the instant and before he could recover from the shock, they seized him and held him fast.

"Durn me if et ain't the very chap!" cried another.

"Not Diamond Dick, Jr.?"

"The same, by thunder!"

"Cactus, ye are in luck."

"Well, I should snicker if I ain't," that villain chuckled. "Why, ye ding-basted diamond dude, ye couldn't a' pleased me better if ye had willed me yer pile and kicked ther bucket!"

"What do you want with me?" cried Bertie.

"What do we want with ye?"

"Yes. Release me instantly!"

"Wull, I reckon not, my daisy. We are goin' to make cold meat of ye first."

"You mean to kill me?"

"That's what we do."

"What for?"

"For a cool hundred; ha, ha, ha!"

"And you do not mean to give me a chance for my life?"

"Wull, hardly a chance, you bet. We are goin' to do ye up so brown that ye won't never croak again."

Even while they were speaking they were binding him.

To struggle was useless.

"But what is my death to you?" Bertie persisted.

He wanted to get at the bottom of it, and learn just who had put them up to it.

He believed that it had been Dave Gibbons, of course, since one of the fellows had mentioned a reward of a hundred he was to get for the work.

"Oh, et ain't nothin' to us," answered the Cactus.

"Then can't I buy off?" asked Bertie.

"Wull, I opine not. If ye have got anything about ye to buy with, we will relieve ye of that fer good luck and good measure."

"You won't find anything on me," said Bertie. "I always cache my dough before I venture into such a den of cut-throats as this town of Tulip. You are welcome to all you get."

It was a bluff, of course.

But it had its effect, and they cursed their luck.

"Wull, got anything more to say before we gag ye?" demanded Cactus.

"If you will spare my life, I will tell you as near as I can where my stuff is hid."

"Ye will do that?"

"Yes."

"It is a bargain, by thunder!"

"We wur goin' to cut yer throat, that I won't deny."

"And what will you do if I keep my word with you?"

"Durn if I know jist what we will do," the Cactus had to admit.

"Maybe you will cut my throat all the same, and laugh at me for a fool."

"No, we won't do that," protested the other two fellows.

"What proof have I that you won't do it?"

"Wull, ye will have to take our word fur et, we reckon, seein' that is all we have got to give ye."

"And I suppose that is worth about a tinker's damn per volume," said Bertie, inclined to be facetious in spite of his peril.

"We had no real desire to slit yer purty white throat anyhow, if we could find some other way that would answer the purpose jist as well. These hyer two chickens wur against cuttin' yer neck."

"I appreciate their goodness," said Bertie. "I had just as lief take my chances some other way, if it is all the same to you. Why not fling me into the creek?"

"We thought of wuss'n that," said assistant No. 1.

"How was that?" asked Bertie.

"And we reckon that ye would beg us to cut yer throat as a favor instead."

"See hyer," suddenly interposed the Cactus, "I'll give ye yer choice of them thar two things, on condition that ye tell us whur yer pile is at."

"I'll do it," said Diamond Dick, Jr., promptly.

"Even though ye ain't heard what t'other fate is to be," reminded assistant cutthroat No. 2.

"I understand that it is to be a chance for my life," said Bertie.

"Ha, ha! Yes, a chance—jist about one in ten million."

"All right, I accept it; I see that you mean business."

"Then tell us yer secret," said the Cactus.

"First tell me what this slim chance is to be," said Bertie.

"Well, it is this: This hyer crick runs down into Devil's Gulch, and no tellin' whur Devil's Gulch runs, fer no man has ever explored it. No man has ever dared do et. See?"

"Yes, I begin to see. Go on; I am interested. But, you will have to be lively or somebody will happen this way and spoil your plans, and you will not get a whack at the thousand or two I have cached. You see, they are spreading out to look for me."

"That's so; come, pards, let's hustle off to the crick with him before Dave kin interfere."

"All right, that's sense."

And away they went, silently like shadows, in the direction of the creek that dashed along down through the gulch about an eighth of a mile below the camp's centre.

No more was said till they reached the creek's bank.

There they stopped.

"Now, then, ye want to know the rest of et?" asked the Cactus.

"Yes, I am eager to hear it all," said Bertie, who had accomplished one point, that of getting out of the immediate reach of the mayor of Tulip. "If I decide to have my throat cut in preference, I will let you know."

"Which I reckon ye will," said cutthroat No. 1.

"Well, give us yer 'tention," said the Cactus. "We ain't got no time to monkey away with ye, and it won't make a cent's worth of difference to the cap'n anyhow."

"I am all attention; go ahead."

"As I told ye, nobody knows anything about Devil's Gulch crick," the Cactus resumed. "It goes down and down, until it takes a dive underground straight under San Juan Mountains—ther crick, I mean, and that is as fur as any livin' mortal knows about it."

"And you mean to send me to explore it?"

"I see you begin to git ther drift of it," laughed the Cactus.

"And a sorry drift it will be fer him," said Assistant No. 2. "Ther darin'est drift any mortal man ever took!"

"That is sartin," agreed the Cactus. "Ye see, youngster, we have a boat hyer, and not a slouch of a boat, either—worth mor'n your life and carcass together, and et seems a durn shame to destroy et on your account, but you have our word. Now, we will put ye into that 'ar boat, bound jist as ye are, and send ye adrift

down this hyer crick, or we'll cut yer throat and fling ye to ther fishes, jist as ye have a mind to elect."

Diamond Dick, Jr., was eager to accept this one chance for his life.

That they meant to kill him, and that they had been hired to do it, there was not the ghost of a doubt.

He had to play the hand with care for the one chance in a thousand, as it really appeared to be.

"I don't know but what I'll back out, after all," he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the two assistants. "We thought ye would, by jingo!"

"Then yer won't accept et, hey?" cried the Cactus. "Wull, then, I will make short work of ye. I give ye jist ten seconds to decide!"

He whipped a bowie from his boot, as he spoke, and placed its keen edge against Diamond Dick, Jr.'s neck, and there could be no doubting that he would be as good as his word.

"Hold on," Bertie called out, "I guess I will take the other way; I wouldn't make a pretty corpse with my throat cut."

This struck the three as being so decidedly funny that they all had to laugh.

As if good looks could make any difference to a dead man.

"Well, spit out yer secret, then," cried Cactus, as soon as he recovered from his fit of risibility.

"You will keep your word with me?" Bertie asked, again.

"Yes, yes, honest Injun. We'll do just what we said, fer it don't matter a darn to us which way you die. One way is sure, and the other can't be any surer."

"All right, then, it's a bargain."

Bertie thereupon told a piece of clever fiction respecting a place where he pretended to have hidden his money before venturing into Tulip, and he told it in such a way and with such minute directions that they swallowed the pill whole without winking at it.

"Good enough!" exclaimed the Cactus. "A blind man had orter be able to find that."

"You will have no trouble about it," said Bertie, "if you follow my directions to the letter. Now, then, send me to my fate, since you are determined to do it."

But Mr. Cactus still fingered that big

bowie knife, as if debating within his own mind what he would do about it.

"Durn me if I know," said he. "Ther captain's orders wur to cut yer throat."

"That ain't no fair, Cactus," interposed one of his assistants.

"No et ain't," chimed in the other.

"He took ye at yer word, and now ye want to keep yer word with him. We hadn't no heart fer cuttin' his throat, anyhow."

"That's what we hadn't, Cactus. Be as good as yer word, and let's git the business off our hands."

"And don't ye go ter balk about et either," said No. 1, pulling a gun.

"That's what's the matter," said the other, following his example.

"Oh, well, it don't make a bit of difference," snarled Cactus. "He will be jist as dead one way as t'other, anyhow."

"Then git yer boat while we guard him," suggested No. 1, who evidently did not feel inclined to trust Cactus very far in the matter. "We'll soon secure him in et and let him go."

"Keep him kivered with yer guns," said Cactus, as he went off to get the boat.

"Bet yer life we wull, and you, too," grated No. 2 under his breath. "You kin thank us fer this one slim chance ye have got, youngster," he added, speaking to Bertie.

"Yes, I guess you are right," Bertie agreed. "I didn't trust him much, anyhow, but I hardly thought he would go back on his word when it could make so little difference to him."

"You don't know Cactus, you don't."

"Say," Bertie whispered, "if you will free my hands before you put me into that boat, I will give you a pointer."

"What is yer pointer?"

"Will ye do it?"

"We'll see. Come, be quick about et."

"You are two to one against the Cactus; what is the matter with your having that pile of mine to yourselves."

"Don't you fool yourself by thinkin' we are asleep, my young rooster, don't ye do et," said the fellow. "We have got that thought in our noodles, and we ain't goin' to take no chances by freein' your hands, either. Shut yer head, now, or it

will be a bullet instead of either knife or boat."

Bertie realized that they were three of a kind, that he had no chance at all save the one last desperate chance the boat afforded, and wisely he held his peace.

In a few minutes more Cactus was there with the boat, and called out for his assistants to hand in the victim.

They carried Bertie down the rugged way to where Cactus was holding the boat, and deposited him in the stern of the craft on his back. That done, they stepped out and shoved the boat off, and it was soon caught by the current and carried swiftly away.

CHAPTER VIII.

LENORA'S FATE AND STANLEY'S GRIT.

When Lenora Naylor was seized, as described, and carried off, at the time of the scrimmage under the tree where her brother had been hanged, she made a desperate struggle.

It was altogether futile, however, for her strength was as nothing compared to that of her captor.

His hand was quickly over her mouth.

She was held as closely as if in the embrace of a bear, almost, and thus he sped away with her, swiftly, silently.

Finding how useless it was to struggle, she succumbed to the inevitable, and lay passive in his arms, while her brain was busy with trying to invent some scheme by which to outwit him.

She lay so still that he believed that she had swooned, and he relaxed just a little the pressure with which he had first clasped her.

Feeling this, and guessing his thought, she carried on the deception and lay lifeless.

She had no idea who the man was.

At first he ran like a deer, until he was well out of reach, when he reduced his pace, and continued at a quick walk, heavily panting.

Presently he came to a steep place, up which he labored with difficulty, and Lenora thought of coming suddenly to, and causing him to lose his balance and fall.

The thought of a broken neck if she did, however, deterred her from making the experiment.

She would wait.

At last the top was reached, and the prisoner knew then where she was.

There was a ledge trail just above the camp, on one side of the gulch in which the camp was situated, and she believed she had been carried to this.

She was not mistaken.

In a few moments her suspicion was confirmed by hearing the sound of stamping horses and then by the low voices of men.

She was immediately seized with horror, for she guessed that they intended to carry her away, another guess in which she was not mistaken, as she was speedily shown.

"Got ther gal?" one of the men whispered.

"You bet I have got her," was the response. "Don't s'pose I would come without her, do ye?"

Lenora had heard that voice before.

"Wull, let me have her while ye mount, Sierra Madre Jim, and then——"

At mention of that name Lenora uttered a scream.

No more terrible name could have been spoken, and to think that she was in the power of this monster.

Sierra Madre Jim was an outlaw, cut-throat, in fact everything that was vile, a desperado without a spark of honor, one who looked upon womankind as of less value than horses.

"You wench!" he cried, giving her mouth a severe cuff with his open hand. "You try that once more, and you will be sorry for it. Give me a gag one of you fellows, and quick about it."

"Spare me," Lenora pleaded, in a low tone.

"Yes, I'll spare you," was the grated answer. "You just yaup once more, and I will show you how I will spare ye!"

"But why have you carried me away? What do you intend doing with me?"

"That is a fool question. Here, open your jaws. You won't, eh!"

The gag was rudely forced into her mouth and secured behind her head, and Lenora regretted now, when too late, that she had allowed the mention of this man's terrible name to betray her into screaming.

Being gagged, she was lifted up on one

of the horses, where a man held her in front of him, and they rode away at a walk, in silence.

No word was spoken until they had passed beyond sight of the camp even by daylight.

"Now, wildcat," said Sierra Madre Jim, then, "I will enlighten you a trifle regarding your fate, if you want to know it."

She could not respond of course.

"Oh! you are gagged; I forgot that for the moment. Well, I am goin' after that ton of gold your brother talked so much about after he got back, and I mean to use you to help me find it."

Lenora gave a start, and would have responded had she been at liberty to do so.

"The fact of the business is," Sierra Madre Jim went on to say, "I know that your brother must have told you all he knew about that cavern where the ton of gold is, and I know that Dave Gibbons meant to make use of you jist the same as I am doin', and it was only a question as to which of us would git you by the hind leg first. See?"

His rough companions, of whom there were four besides himself, laughed at his attempt to be funny.

"By the way," he ordered, "take that thing out of her mouth now, Bill. She kin yaup all she wants to, and nobody will hear her."

The gag was removed.

"Now, what have ye got to say to et?" the outlaw demanded.

"I don't know anything about it," the girl answered, as well as she could. "My brother had a map of the region, which he made while he was sick, but now that has fallen into the hands of Dave Gibbons, I suppose."

"The mischief ye say!"

"That is true. I was going to get it when they came and caught us under the tree and drove us off—or you carried me off, rather."

"Yes, rather; that's the word," the ruffian laughed. "I rather did, fer a fact!"

Again his followers roared.

"But can't you take us to the place without that map?" the outlaw demanded.

"I do not believe that I could take you

there with it, sir. What do I know about such work? I beg of you allow me to return to the camp."

"Oh, no, we ain't lettin' you return, not by a whole lot we ain't. But we are goin' to have that map, you can bet your life on that. Dave and his men will soon set out, and we'll hold 'em up for it if we can't do any better."

They pushed on, straight into the mountains, and little more was said by any of the party.

Meanwhile, Mort Briscow and Zach Temple had taken Elmer Stanley to their cabin, where they closed the door and proceeded first of all to look after his hurt.

They found merely a lump on his forehead where his head had come in contact with the stone on the ground when he fell.

In a few minutes he began to feel all right again.

"Mighty glad it is no worse," declared Mort, with a good deal of relief in his tone.

"That's so," agreed Zach, "for thar is hot work jist ahead fer all of us, and there is no time to be lost gittin' at it, either."

"The first thing to be done is to recover Lenora out of that devil's power," said Stanley.

"He is off into the mountains with her by this time, but we will be hot on his trail, you bet. It is goin' to be a race fer that ton of gold, pard."

"I care nothing for the gold," Stanley urged.

"No, but the rest of 'em do, you bet. And we must make that our objective point in order to foul with 'em."

"Where is my friend?" Stanley suddenly asked.

"Yer friend?"

"Yes, that young man who called himself Diamond Dick, Jr."

"Don't know; haven't seen a thing of him. Mebby he wasn't as much a friend as you—"

"I won't hear that said of him," said Stanley, sternly. "He is as true as gold. No man who wasn't would have done what he did."

"Well, we hope ye ain't mistaken, that's all."

"But, we must act. What is it you

have to tell me? We must be up and at work!"

"Well, hyer it is in a nutshell: Dave Gibbins is goin' to set out to-night to find that cave, and Juan Domingo with him. But that ain't all of it yet. Sierra Madre Jim is goin' to balk him, and get there first, and I suppose that is why he has stolen the gal."

"My curse upon him! But, he shall suffer for it if one hair of her head is harmed, I swear it!"

"But we ought to find that new pard of yours, Stanley."

"Yes, he must be found. He has pledged his word that he will aid Lenora in recovering that lost fortune."

"And we can't find him stoppin' here. Let's get ready, and set out on Dave Gibbons' trail soon as he starts. Sierra Madre Jim will stop him some'rs, and then will be our chance to chip in."

"That is a good plan," agreed Stanley. "Make ready as soon as possible, and get the horses."

And so it was that in less than an hour these three men rode silently out of Tulip, following the general windings of Devil's Gulch.

Dave Gibbons and his four chozen comrades had preceded them, and all were heading for the one general objective point, the secret cave where the ton of gold lay awaiting claimants.

It was to be a desperate undertaking, for not only were there natural difficulties to be overcome, but the way to the treasure trove was guarded by a band of renegade Apache Indians, at whose hands the two companions of Henry Naylor had met their death.

The two rival expeditions, that of Dave Gibbons and his Mexican ally, and that of Sierra Madre Jim and his band, had not been hastily formed; they had been preparing for the expedition for days in advance. They were armed to the teeth, and had provisions in plenty, and were well prepared to force their way into the very heart of the mountain wilds.

Which of these would come off victors? And against them, what chance had Elmer Stanley and his two pards?

CHAPTER IX.

THE DRIFT THROUGH DEVIL'S GULCH.

Diamond Dick, Jr., nerved himself for his fate.

When the boat was shoved off, and when he felt the current of the creek seize upon it, he knew that his life hung by the slenderest thread.

He regretted the temerity and desire for danger and adventure that had led him to place his head in the lion's jaws, as it were, by coming alone and unaided to this town of Tulip.

Diamond Dick, his father, would willingly have joined him in the task undertaken, had Bertie wired him; or his friend and pard of many an adventure, Handsome Harry, would have been glad of the opportunity; but Bertie had taken up with the idea suddenly, and as suddenly acted upon it.

And the idea? What was it?

The hunting down and bringing to justice the badly wanted Edward Andrews, alias—well, he had no end of other names.

His latest offense had been against the Government, and there was a reward of \$2,000 hanging over his head. For six months the Government officials had been working hard to apprehend him.

Bertie had by chance gotten an inkling of his whereabouts, and having been idle for a time, the desire was strong within him to plunge at once into something that would stir up his blood, and he had succeeded, almost beyond his wildest expectations.

It had been his intention to visit this town of Tulip, away up in the foothills of the San Juan, and there quietly work up the clew that had by chance fallen to him; but fate had so ordered things that at almost the very moment of his arrival, he was plunged at once into a vortex of furious excitement, of which his present predicament had been the culmination.

No wonder that he felt some regret for his venture. But, then, how was he to know the thing was going to "go off" so suddenly?

As the water of the creek caught the boat in its embrace, Bertie felt it rock and turn first this way and then that, and then came a steady, gliding motion that was rather pleasant.

Overhead the stars winked and blinked with peaceful unconcern, and, but for the uncertainty of the termination of the voyage, Diamond Dick, Jr., might have wished a continuance of the peaceful motion for an indefinite period. But it was soon rudely broken.

Of a sudden the boat struck a rock, was whirled around and nearly capsized, and its helpless passenger was banged about mercilessly.

"Well, the performance has commenced, it seems," said Diamond Dick, Jr., to himself. "Now I wonder just how many minutes of life I have got left? I wonder whether I made a mistake in not electing to have my throat cut instead of taking this daring drift?"

The creek was a swift one, and its water was high just at this particular time.

For a little while, after that first shock, the boat glided on with only a rocking and bobbing motion, as soon as the effect of the shock had passed away.

Bertie was afraid that a hole had been stove in the bottom, but as no water touched him, after a considerable lapse of time, he concluded that such had not been the case.

That, he believed was reserved for some other occasion.

He recalled with a feeling of horror what Cactus and his pair of kindred spirits had told him about the disappearance of the creek under the mountain.

If die he must, he wished that the end might come before he reached that point.

Thud! Swish!

Another blow upon a rock, a hissing of the water as the boat swung around and almost keeled over, and the gliding motion had ceased.

"Hello!" exclaimed Bertie, instantly. "While there is life there is hope, it is said. I have got some life in me yet, and here is where I pin my hope for the time being."

The boat seemed to be securely lodged.

Bertie reflected what he had better do? And before he could do much of anything it would be necessary for him to free his hands, if possible.

He moved to rise to a sitting position, but the slightest motion he made caused the bottom of the boat to grate and

scrape on the rock that held it, and he was afraid it would slip off again.

"That won't do," he decided. "I have got to keep mighty still here, or my bark will be off on the bounding billows again, sure pop."

He was in a dilemma.

If he moved he was in danger of sending the boat on its journey, and if he remained inactive he was likely to remain a prisoner.

After due deliberation, he decided to await the coming of daylight before doing anything. It would be a most uncomfortable night, bound and with his arms behind his back, but there was no help for it.

So he settled down carefully and closed his eyes, making himself as comfortable as circumstances would allow.

How long he remained that way he never knew.

It was long enough, at all events, for him to fall asleep, for he awoke with a start.

His arms were tingling sharply, for the circulation was impeded, and as he awoke he felt the boat give a long, rasping sound, and in another moment it was on its way again.

Bertie was wide awake in an instant now.

"Must have done it in my sleep," he said to himself. "I have given a jerk or a turn, enough to start the thing, and here I am again. Well, no help for it, I am in the hand of fate, and no use kicking."

It was the same easy, gliding, swaying motion as before, and no need to dwell upon it.

Occasionally it was broken by a thump or jar, but it was on and ever on, and finally the walls of the gulch began to appear higher against the stars.

The gulch was growing deeper and darker with every passing minute. At times it would be narrow, and the boat would be carried through some place where the water hissed and gurgled spitefully.

Finally a great, black shadow loomed up that cast a pall of blackness over the boat and its occupant. Half the stars overhead were suddenly blotted out, and the remaining half were rapidly disap-

pearing. A sullen, deep-mouthed roar was heard.

Diamond Dick, Jr., knew what was coming now.

He braced himself for it as well as he could, and waited; he had no choice.

With his legs under the middle seat of the boat, and with his tied hands clutching the stearn seat as he lay there on his back, he was reasonably secure.

That is to say, he was secure so long as the boat remained right-side up.

Another moment, and all the stars were gone.

A great, gaunt blackness seemed falling down upon the gorge, to blot it out forever.

That deep roar was growing deeper, the boat seemed to be gliding more swiftly as it rushed to its doom, and then of a sudden came—the end.

A great, hollow, horrible something seemed to swallow the boat and its occupant at a gulp, that roar became a sonorous rumble, such as is heard when two big shells are held over the ears, but a thousand times magnified.

All around was Stygian darkness.

Bertie knew full well what had happened, and it is no discredit to him to say that a cold perspiration had broken out upon his face.

He had been carried under the mountains, and what fate now awaited him he did not dare imagine. He simply lay there, waiting, waiting, and as he waited he made his peace with God.

But the end came not.

It seemed an hour; it seemed a night—ay, it seemed an age that he was borne on, and on, and ever on.

At last the heavy pall of gloom seemed to lift a little.

Bertie thought at first that it was a trick his eyes were playing him, but no, it was true.

The darkness was less intense, light was permeating it from somewhere, the shadows could now be seen rather than felt, and finally came a glorious burst of heaven's sunlight.

Never in his life before had Diamond Dick, Jr., so fully appreciated the beauties of old Sol.

He was again in a narrow gulch.

High above towered great walls of

rock, with here and there grim shafts and steeples of basalt, time-worn and stately.

Into this gulch the morning sun was just peering down, giving a touch of splendor to its corrugated walls.

But the the creek, the boat, the constant dangers—these were too real to admit of doubt.

The creek was here more swift and turbulent than at any other point along the route, and the dangers were, of course, just so much increased.

Now and again a grim splinter of rock would claim Bertie's attention as the boat shot past it in dangerous proximity, showing him the speed at which he was being carried on into the wilderness.

Now and then there would be a shock and a grating sound, then a thump and bump, then perchance a thud that would cause the boat to veer and careen almost to the point of overturing, and the helpless passenger could not but wonder that he had so long escaped disaster.

But the end came at last. There was a great shock, the boat seemed to be lifted clear of the water for a moment, then it fell and turned, whirled around for a moment, struck again, capsized, there was a grating, rasping sound, and then the gulch seemed of a sudden to stand still while the waters rushed on their way with mad haste.

CHAPTER X.

THE WORK OF FIENDS.

"Steady, now! Put up yer hands!"

The command was one not to be idly disregarded.

Elmer Stanley and his two pards were fairly caught in a trap, and were forced to submit.

It was high noon of the day following their departure from the town of Tulip, and they had been pushing straight on into the mountain fastness with scarcely a stop.

All three were keen-eyed men, well used to the wilds, and they had been able to follow the trail without a balk, thus far.

The iron-shod hoofs had left their marks even on the hardest rock.

The command quoted was uttered by Dave Gibbons, and he stood covering the trio with a Winchester at his shoulder.

Nor was he alone; behind him were his men, every one with rifle unslung and ready for action, and the little company of three had no choice in the matter.

"Now, see whar ye are?" cried Gibbons. "Men of your hoss sense should have known better."

"We cannot discount fate," said Stanley, sadly.

"Neither kin ye discount me," declared Gibbons, with his rough dialect prominent. "Do ye know what is goin' to become of ye now?"

"I suppose we will be foully murdered," said Stanley.

Gibbons laughed.

"Now ye wouldn't take us fer men of that stamp, would ye?" he asked, with a leer. "We don't intend to do nothin' of the kind, unless ye resist and force us to et."

"We are in no situation to resist," said Stanley.

"It don't look as if we wur, anyhow," added Mort Briscow.

"Then ye mean to give us a show?" queried Zach Temple.

"Yes, I am goin' to give you two a chance fer yer lives," said Gibbons.

"And what about our pard?" demanded Mort.

"He has got to die!"

This was said with fierce emphasis.

"Then ye might jist as well kill us, too," said Zach. "We stick to our pard, through thick and thin."

"You had better think twice about that," said Gibbons.

"Et ain't necessary; them's my sentiments, too," spoke up Mort.

"All we ask is that ye make short work of it," added Zach.

"We would do that, you bet, but the fact of the business is we want to use ye," said Gibbons. "We have got to fight Apaches before we kin come to that 'ar cavern, and every man will count one."

"And you will spare my pards and give them a chance, if they will agree to help you fight through?" asked Stanley.

He knew there was no use asking his own life at the hands of such a man.

"Yes, I will do that."

"Then, boys, accept the chance," said

Elmer, turning to his friends. "You can not help me by refusing."

"But we kin die with ye," protested Bristow.

"And by heavens we will!"

So cried Temple, and with the words he jerked a gun from his belt, in the face of the danger that threatened.

It was a fatal move for him.

Quick as a flash, before he could lift his arm, Dave Gibbons shot him straight through the head, and his body dropped and fell over the ledge.

"Anybody else want to try that game on?" Gibbons demanded, meaningly.

"For God's sake, don't throw your life away too, Mort," cried Stanley, horrified. "It can do me no good, and you have a ghost of a chance if you accept the offer he makes."

Briscow was pale to the lips.

The horror of seeing his pard shot down by his side was too much for him.

The merciless eyes of Dave Gibbons were on him, and his rifle was still covering him and Stanley, having never been removed from his shoulder.

"I reckon thar is no choice about it," said Briscow.

"You are right, thar ain't," assured Gibbons. "You ride ahead hyer and jine my men, and surrender yer weapons to 'em."

"There in one favor I would ask," spoke up Stanley.

"What is et?"

"I suppose I am to be shot, and I would like to give my pard a message to deliver if he escapes with his life."

Gibbons smiled grimly.

Perhaps he had no intention that the man should ever escape with his life finally.

But he said:

"Wull, I won't deny ye that privilege, if it will be any satisfaction to ye, but be quick about et."

"You will allow me to dismount?"

"Yes, durn it, dismount if ye want to, et can't make any difference, and we want yer hoss anyhow."

It was a striking scene, a terrible situation.

The three men had been ambushed on a broad ledge high up on the side of a deep gorge.

Still higher rose the walls of rock, barren and desolate, while down below rushed a mountain stream that poured its waters into a great, broad pool of inky blackness.

Into this pool the body of poor Temple had fallen.

Stanley dismounted on the right-hand side of his horse, nearest the edge of the yawning chasm.

He took a step or two forward in the direction of Briscow, and no one could guess the purpose he had in mind before it was revealed by his action.

Of a sudden he gave a spring, and dived headlong from the cliff to the frightful depths.

Crack!

Bang!

The rifles spoke quickly, but not quickly enough, for the action had been so sudden that there was no time for aim.

A volley followed instantly after the two shots, and bullets went pinging into the dark pool below, but they were impotent, since now the man could no longer be seen.

"Well, I be darn!"

So ejaculated Dave Gibbons.

"*Vindicta!*" cried his Mexican ally. "Who would have thought it?"

"Well, it makes no great difference to me, if he preferred that manner of death," said Gibbons.

"He, haw, haw!" laughed cutthroat Cactus, who was one of the band. "He has gone to jine Diamond Dick, Jr.!"

At that they all laughed, yet never spoke man truer words.

Cactus had reported to Gibbons concerning the fate he had consigned Bertie to, and had received the mayor's approval.

There was only one regret he expressed when told about it, and that was that a good boat had been sacrificed for so useless a purpose.

"Yes, he will jine him in the hot place," Gibbons agreed.

And then he added:

"Well, no use tarryin' hyer; disarm that feller till he is needed to fight Apaches, and then I reckon he will fight fer his life and we kin trust him with his guns."

This was accordingly done.

Briscow was silent, and submitted sorrowfully.

It would have been more than folly for him to resist; it would have been to throw his life away.

He submitted without a protest, but in his heart was the resolve that Dave Gibbons should die by his hand before he was many hours older.

The extra horses having been secured, the party went on their way.

"That was a good piece of business on your part, Cactus," the ringleader complimented, as they rode along, "discovering that Stanley and his pards wur on our trail."

Cactus grinned.

"They don't foolish Cactus a whole lot, now I'm tellin' ye," he stoutly averred. "When they do they have got to git up early, you bet."

"And you still think that Sierra Madre Jim is ahead of us?"

"I am jist as sure of it as if I had seen him with my own eyes," was the reply.

"Then he must have got around the Apaches by some trail that we don't know anything about."

"That's what he's done, cap'n, havin' that gal with him, and mebbly the map her brother made besides. And that ain't all, nuther."

"Not all?"

"No."

"What more?"

"My private opine is that he is in cahoots with them 'ar same Apache devils, and that when we fight them we will be fightin' Sierra Madre Jim as well, mebbly as their leader."

"Thunder! I never thought of that."

"Don't ye see how plain et is?"

"Yes, it is as plain as the nose on yer face, when ye see it," the captain agreed.

"I tell you thar is goin' to be music in the air before we git done with this business," Cactus further declared.

"*Carramba*, yes!" agreed the Mexican ally. "But, with a ton of gold for our reward, *Vindicta!* we must be demons, not men, with such a prize for the winning."

He had no intention of speaking facetiously, but to attain that degree meant but a slight remove from what they actually were at their best.

They pressed forward, until presently their further advance was challenged, when the struggle began in good and deadly earnest; and the tug of war was at hand.

CHAPTER XI.

SIERRA MADRE JIM'S DOUBLE HAND.

Sierra Madre Jim and his men, with their captive, continued pushing straight on into the mountains, as we left them.

It was a long, weary ride for Lenora, but she bore up bravely, with the hope high in her heart that sooner or later would come the chance for her to escape.

If not, if there was no escape, then she would have it in her power to take her life, and that she would do rather than live to shame and suffering.

At daylight a brief halt was called.

A hasty breakfast was made, it was as hastily eaten, and they were soon in the saddles and on their way once more.

Few men had a better knowledge of the Sierra Madre than Sierra Madre Jim.

Yet even he had never penetrated to the region that was reputed to guard the cavern and the ton of gold.

That region was held by a band of renegade Apaches, as we have elsewhere stated, Indians who had never made peace with the Government, and could not be induced to do so.

But Sierra Madre Jim had an advantage over David Gibbons and his ally, in that he knew the chief of this band of Apaches.

He had made his acquaintance two or three years before the time of our story.

Able to talk in the Apache tongue, he had made friends with him.

He meant to seek him out now.

Having a general idea where he would find the band encamped, he bore in that direction.

Finally he was rewarded. He came upon the Indians in a spot in the howling wilds that was partly wooded and partly fertile.

At sight of the whites, the Indians made ready to attack them, but Sierra Madre Jim riding forward alone, making a sign of peace, was recognized and speedily made welcome.

His men remained apart until Jim had a chance to acquaint the chief with the purpose of the visit.

The chief soon came forward and shook hands.

"What good wind brings my white brother here?" he asked in his native language.

"I have come to warn my brother of danger," said Jim, telling his lie with an air of solemn earnest. "You have been my friend; I am your friend."

"Good," grunted the Apache. "And what is the danger?"

"You and your tribe guard the way to the hidden place where much gold is," said Jim.

"The way is guarded," the Indian gave assent.

"Well, a band of bad white men are coming to force their way into that place, and I am here to lend you aid in keeping them out, if you will accept the offer."

"Another?" asked the Indian. "Not long ago we killed two white men and sent another back to his people as a warning not to come here more. We must this time teach them a lesson they will remember."

"That is what I have warned you for," said Jim.

"But, my white brother is not all unselfishness," the wily Apache said further. "You want a reward."

"I want a favor, but I have not asked it first. I have warned you; you have it in your power to grant my request or refuse it."

"And if I refuse it?"

"I will accept the refusal and go away; I will prove that I am a friend whose friendship is above rewards."

The Indian gave a series of grunts while he reflected upon this.

"Let me hear my brother's request," he presently asked.

"You know where a cave is, and in it much gold."

The Indian gave a nod in answer.

"You will notice that I have with me a young woman."

The Indian looked, and nodded again.

"Her mind is turned," said Jim, touching his forehead. "It was her brother you sent back to his people, of the three men who tried to penetrate to the place of treasure."

This caused the Indian a look and grunt of surprise.

"She loved me, but now is turned against me, her mind being clouded," the rascal continued to lie. "The life of her brother is in danger, for he is a prisoner and his people threaten to hang him, thinking he found the treasure and murdered his two companions."

The Indian gave attention, watching the speaker closely, but Jim was equal to the scrutiny.

He did not flinch.

"Now, to clear her brother," he went on, "she must see this place of treasure with her own eyes, and must take back proof that her brother did not murder his companions. And you, chief, are the only man who can give her this proof."

"And what would you?"

"I would have this girl's mind restored, her brother's life saved, and my own happiness assured."

Rather a clever lie, as a whole.

"So shall it be," said the chief. "I will aid you if you will also aid me."

"In what manner?"

"Against these men who would invade my domain and wrest from me this gold of which you have heard."

"I am more than willing to do that, chief. I have something more at stake in that direction, as you shall hear."

"Let me know everything."

"I have a rival for the hand of this flower of the foothills. He is the leader of the band I have told you about. I seek to remove him from my path."

"Ha! I thought I should find the selfish motive at last," said the chief.

Sierra Madre Jim saw that he had gone a step too far.

Yet he did not show it.

"May not a man have more than one horse?" he demanded. "May he not have more than one blanket? More than one gun? And yet may he not be a true and loyal friend?"

"Then you do not want the heap of gold?"

"Are my shoulders so strong that I could carry a ton? Are you so weak that I could wrest it from you, or so blind that you could not see me carrying it? I seek nothing but what I have told you. Aid me or refuse me, we are still friends the same."

The Indian held out his hand.

"Your tongue is not crooked," he remarked. "I will grant all you have asked of me. Now, where are these men?"

"They entered the hills by the Devil's Gulch."

"And you came in by the high ledge trail."

"Yes."

"And where are they now?"

"They are still following the gulch, the one where the swift water runs."

"It is the same one. Are they far ahead?"

"Not far."

"Then hearken. We can cut them off, secrete ourselves in the great gorge, and lie in ambush for them to approach. There you can slay your rival, and I can destroy those who would defy me."

"Your hand on it, chief."

"Here is my hand."

They shook hands, and the first part of Sierra Madre Jim's scheme had been perfected.

It remained now to be seen whether he would be able to carry out the second part, when the time came, and get away with the ton of gold.

The compact made, Sierra Madre Jim signaled to his men to come forward, and all were soon as friendly as if they were of one race and one language.

An Indian buck came running to his chief, out of breath and excited.

He was one who had been sent out from the ambush to spy upon the invaders, and he announced their approach.

"It is well," said the chief, with gravity. "Our warriors have grown tired of waiting to drink their blood. How near are they?"

"They are only around the double bend now, chief," was the reply.

"Good! We are ready."

"And we will give them more than they have bargained for," declared Sierra Madre Jim. "We will wipe them off the face of the earth."

The chief gave some hasty instructions to his men, and they posted themselves at every possible point of advantage along the face of the cliffs above the trail.

But about that time Cactus returned to his party from a little scouting excursion.

"Thunder is ter pay," he broke out.

"In what way?" asked Dave Gibbons.

"Ther way is blocked."

"Blocked?"

"Yes, by about fifty 'Paches, more or less."

"Blazes! Then we might as well throw up the sponge, I reckon, if there's as many as that."

"Not by a big sight, cap'n."

"Then you have got a plan?"

"You bet."

"What is it?"

"We'll stop right hyer and let 'em 'tack us. We couldn't get a better place, and ten to one we'll drive 'em off."

"Then they are in ambush?"

"Yes, and would 'a 'et us all up ef we had got into their trap. But you take my 'vice and stop hyer, and we'll win ther fight."

So it was arranged, and they awaited the attack.

In similar manner, Sierra Madre Jim and his allies awaited their coming into the ambush.

One of the most interested ones of them all was Lenora Naylor, who had a full understanding of all that was going on. Having been cared for from infancy by a half-caste squaw, she knew more or less of the Indian tongue.

As time passed, and the little band of whites did not appear, the chief sent out other scouts to see what was the matter.

When these returned they reported the situation.

"That means that we have got to attack, chief," said Sierra Madre Jim.

"Well, we are strong enough, if they are so few," said the chief. "We will begin it at once, and their scalps will soon be at our belts."

To all of this Lenora listened, praying that chance would be given her to make her escape while the fight was going on.

She cared little whither she went, so long as she got out of the power of Sierra Madre Jim.

Her heart sank, however, when she found that she was to be bound and left under guard while the fight was in progress, and it sank more when this was carried out.

One of Sierra Madre Jim's men and an Indian were left to that duty, and these, knowing that the prisoner was bound, gave more attention to the fight than to

her, feeling that she was secure enough and needed little watching.

The fight lasted two hours, at the end of which time the Indians refused to fight longer and their chief had to draw them off. About a round dozen of their band had been picked off, while they had not been able to kill a single man of the invaders, and they had had enough of it. And when the chief and Sierra Madre Jim returned to the point where Jim's prisoner had been left, the girl was not there.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DARING DRIFT RESUMED.

Diamond Dick, Jr., finding that he was still alive, after the rough tumbling he had received, looked around him.

He found himself lying upon a sloping rock, around which the water went surging with mad fury.

At his feet lay the boat, bottom-side up, and apparently uninjured.

It was half out of the water and half in, and the dividing of the current around the rock kept it evenly balanced in its position.

He saw where the boat had tumbled over a natural dam some six feet high, which had been the cause of the turning over and of the spiling he had got at the same time.

Strange to say, he had fallen upon the rock high and dry out of the water.

Just below him was a great black pool, where the waters went surging around and around in endless motion, as if some giant hand were stirring the pool with an invisible paddle.

High on every hand rose the rock walls of the gulch, and it looked to Diamond Dick, Jr., as if he had been at last deposited in a place where he must slowly die of starvation, for there did not seem to be a possible avenue of escape.

But, there was the boat, there was the rushing stream. If he had come thus far bound and helpless, surely he would dare to venture to continue the daring drift farther, once he could get free of the cords that bound him and have the use of his legs and arms.

But there was the sticking point.

How was he to get rid of the bonds? It looked an impossible task, at first.

Bertie was not the chap to say die, however. He had gotten out of many a fix before, and he would get out of this one—somehow.

When he had thought for a time, he worked his way to the edge of the rock on which he lay, and throwing his legs over a corner of it, began to move them up and down, bringing the cords into friction over a sharp angle.

In a little while he was rewarded. The cords gave way and his feet were freed.

It was little trouble, then, to get upon his feet and find a place where a similar plan could be operated for the freeing of his hands.

At last he was free.

"Now, this is something like it," he said to himself. "I am glad I declined the generous offer of Mr. Cactus to cut my throat. But, I am in a pretty bad fix none the less. Ha! what is that?"

He thought he heard a rifle shot.

Starting and looking around, something caught his eye.

It was the body of Zach Temple falling down the face of the high wall straight for the dark, surging pool.

The body struck the water, disappeared, presently reappeared again, and was carried around the dark basin in the rapid current, turning this way and that.

"Who can that be, I wonder?" said Bertie, filled with horror, for the moment. "A murder has been done, that is plain."

As the body came around to where he stood, he leaned forward to get a good look at the face, if it happened for a moment to turn toward him.

Nearer and nearer the body came, but it looked as if he would not be given a chance to see the face, but of a sudden, just as the current was bearing it past it turned.

"My God!" cried Bertie, at the sight. "It is one of Stanley's pards, as I live!"

Eagerly he turned his gaze up toward the point whence it had come.

He could see nothing save the bare wall of rock.

From his position, not even the location of the plateau trail was discernible.

All the rocks were seamed with the finger-marks of time, and if he saw where the plateau was it was not distinguishable from one of these.

He heard no voices; he could see no one.

But of a sudden a human form came into sight, as if the man had been thrown out from some invisible crevice in the rock.

Down, down, he came, arms and legs wildly spread at first, but presently drawing in until the body was as straight as an arrow, and came with similar swiftness.

Then the reports of the rifles, then the volley, and Bertie heard the bullets ping into the water.

This man, whoever he was, was alive.

Down and down, steady and straight, and then the frightful plunge into the deep, dark pool!

Bertie was keenly alive with interest now, needless to say. He leaned over the dark water and almost breathlessly awaited the reappearance of the daring man.

The moments seemed hours.

Would the man never appear? Had he been killed on some hidden rock?

Perhaps the horrible vortex had sucked him down into its embrace so that there could be no breaking. Ah!

Up shot the head and half the body out of the water, and then began a battle for life.

The man was near the rock wall, and tried frantically to find some projection to which he could cling fast, but there was none.

His back was toward Bertie.

He was trying to face the current rather than swim with it.

As he was carried near the rock on which Bertie was standing, Bertie saw that he must pass close to it.

To think was to act with him.

He threw himself down on his face, hooking his feet over a projection.

Thus he waited with his head, arms and shoulders hanging just over the surface of the dark water, and in a few minutes the struggling man was near at hand.

Was he within reach? Would Bertie be able to save him after all?

Another moment would prove.

It came.

Bertie made a sudden thrust with his arms, reaching to the utmost limit at the same time.

His right fingers came in contact with the man's shoulder, slipped, but had the effect to throw the man's equilibrium in that direction.

Another grab, this time with the left hand, and the fingers clutched the collar of his coat, and once a hold was had, Bertie held on like grim death and drew the man to the rock.

"Diamond Dick, Jr.!"

"Stanley!"

That their surprise was genuine needs no attesting.

After a few moments of resting, Stanley, with Bertie's aid, drew himself out upon the rock.

And then there was an exchange of experiences, which, needless to say, was listened to with keenest interest by each.

It looked, as Stanley remarked, as if Providence was enlisted on their side in the unequal contest, and he believed that they would yet win if they persevered.

Their experiences having been related, they applied their minds to the problem before them.

"The first thing," said Bertie, "is to get out of here, and there is only one way."

"The boat."

"Exactly. We shall have to continue this daring drift until we can find a place to land."

"Ha! by the way, did you get that map all right?"

"Glad you mentioned it; it had slipped my mind. Yes, I got it, and here it is."

"It may be the means of leading us out of here, if it is a map of the region we are in. And it may lead us to the treasure."

"You are right. Here, sit down and we will study it together."

And they did.

The sun was looking straight down into the gulch, and lighted up the rock on which they were stranded.

Bertie spread out the map on the rock, and they lay down and began to study it with an interest such as their situation and hopes called forth.

"We are on the right trail," said Bertie, presently. "See here is a creek flowing through a deep gulch, which must be the very one we are in. And here

is a dark spot that may indicate this very pool."

"Yes, yes, I believe you are right," said Stanley, excitedly.

"I am sure of it. See, it is a place all cut up with canons, and here is indicated a great circle, or basin. And these arrow heads, they must point the way to the cave. We are above that great basin, Stanley; we must drift down to it."

"It will be at the risk of our lives, Diamond Dick, Jr."

"It is sure death to remain here."

"Well, I am with you."

"Then let us right the boat and be on our way."

This they did, and examination proved that the boat had sustained no disabling injury.

It was righted, pulled over the sloping rock and launched in the whirlpool, and the two daring spirits got in and pushed off, without oar or paddle with which to guide their craft.

They were swiftly carried around the basin, and at the opposite side the discovery was made that the continuation of the creek was over a natural dam where was a fall of some feet, a difficulty they would have to overcome before they could proceed.

Needless to dwell upon the point; they got the boat over the dam and down the falls, and launching it again in the water below, they were speeding on their way into an unknown region, and perhaps to an unknown fate.

For an hour or longer they were borne on and on, using every effort for the preservation of their boat from accident, till at last, of a sudden, a startling command broke upon their ears:

"Up with yer hands, thar, you sons of varmints!"

At the instant their boat was in a most dangerous rapids, with dangerous rocks on every hand.

It was requiring their best effort to keep her from striking, and now this startling order rendered their position ten times more perilous.

They glanced up, and there, partly behind a ledge of rock on their right, stood Dave Gibbons, with a rifle in one hand and revolver in the other, and a look of ashen surprise on his countenance.

Before they could return their gaze to their work, and even before the man on the rocks could shoot at them, they ran upon one of the mentioned rocks, and as the boat struck the rock it capsized, throwing the two men into the torrent.

It had all happened in a fraction of a minute, and Dave Gibbons, looking down from his place of vantage, saw nothing more of the two men, and the boat, presently dislodging, swung around with the current and was carried on its way empty.

CHAPTER XIII.

DISCOVERY AND DISASTER.

"That was a close call, Stanley."

"That's what it was, Diamond Dick, Jr. I don't care for another as close."

"And only for our playing the under-water dodge that fiend would have picked us off. We are a pair of lucky dogs."

It was some time later, and they were standing on a sheltered shelf along the edge of the creek, trying to repair the damages to their boat in order to resume their daring drift down the dismal canon. They had secured the boat, after much difficulty.

While they were working and talking a slight sound caught Bertie's quick ears, and he wheeled instantly with a gun in hand.

There was instantly a glad, joyous cry.

It was Lenora.

"Lenora!"

"Elmer! Elmer!"

They were instantly in each other's embrace.

Questions and answers were thick and fast, and the girl told of her escape from Sierra Madre Jim while the fight was going on, and of her subsequent wanderings.

It was a joyous meeting.

But it did not stop the work in hand, which was pushed forward with all haste.

At last repairs had been made as well as possible, and it was decided that they should press on their way as long as it was light enough for them to see.

They entered the boat, and the flow of the creek being here less rapid and turbulent, the water being nearer a level, they proceeded without further mishaps. Just when it was getting too dark for

them to go farther with safety, they came out into a great, broad basin.

"This is the place," said Bertie, immediately.

"Not a doubt of it," agreed Stanley, "and now we need only daylight to discover the cavern and the ton of gold."

The boat was drawn out of the water, and Lenora was made as comfortable as possible in it for the night, Bertie and Stanley throwing themselves down on the rock near at hand.

On the morrow they were early astir, and by that time the pangs of hunger were becoming well-nigh insufferable. Bertie proposed going out in quest of something to eat, as the first business of the day, no matter what it might be, and the others were to await his return.

He started, crossing the basin in the boat, and took the first trail, rather opening, for of trails there were none. He presently found himself a mile or more from his point of starting. He was on a ledge at some height about the basin, when of a sudden he heard the report of a rifle and a bullet whizzed past his face.

Almost before he could take action, another report was heard and another bullet sped even nearer than the first, and he started and ran along the ledge to get out of range. The ledge was narrow, and he had to hug close to the wall to keep his footing while he sought shelter from the unseen attack. Shouts told him that he was being pursued, and presently a friendly niche in the wall presenting a place for him to stop and defend himself, he entered it.

He had no sooner passed the entrance than he found he was in a cavern of considerable size, but there was no time then for him to look around. One of his pursuers was close at hand. Looking out, he saw Cactus coming toward the entrance, and with a cool aim he sent him rolling down into the narrow gorge that yawned below to receive him. This called a halt, and Diamond Dick, Jr., seized the opportunity to survey the place, never dreaming for the moment that he had stumbled upon the cavern that contained the ton of gold.

The crevice by which he had entered was high, and admitted ample light for his purpose, and as Bertie looked calmly

around his eyes took in the picture that had in all probability last been seen by Henry Naylor and his companions. There was the ton of gold, in a beautiful, yellow pyramid that would have sent the average prospector almost insane with joy. For the moment Bertie forgot his hunger, forgot the outlaws, and feasted his eyes upon the store of wealth. It contained nuggets from the size of a bullet to the size of his fist, and for a full quarter of an hour Bertie reveled in the delights of imagination.

In the fore part of the cavern were the bones of men, together with broken implements and weapons. These men had no doubt died guarding the treasure their hands had heaped up. It must have taken them months, perhaps years, to accumulate such a store.

Voices without recalled Diamond Dick, Jr., to the perils of the moment, and seizing one fine nugget that must have weighed full sixty ounces, he put it in his jacket pocket and sprang to the entrance.

It was the only specimen of the vast treasure that any human would ever carry away from that cavern, as swift coming events proved.

Dave Gibbons and his crew were on the right of the cavern, holding an earnest consultation, and Bertie passed out unseen by them, and started on a run down the ledge to break the news to his companions.

He had not gone a great way when he was fired upon, but holding up the big nugget he had secured he gave a yell of defiance and ran recklessly on, and he was not pursued. The sight of that nugget had dazzled the minds if not the eyes of the outlaws.

Those who had fired upon him were Sierra Madre Jim and his allies, and noting the direction from which he had come, and eager to find the cave, they rushed madly along the ledge only to come face to face with Dave Gibbons, Juan Domingo, and the rest of their crew, at the entrance to the cavern, where a hot fight was at once begun.

Nor did they fight alone, for down in the gorge, behind almost every bowlder, were the Indians, who fired upon them with their rifles, Sierra Madre Jim's

perfidy having become apparent to the chief of the band, and he was bent upon wiping out every man of both parties.

Diamond Dick, Jr., reached the boat in safety, and with his hat for a paddle he quickly crossed the basin and landed at the place where Stanley and the girl were awaiting him.

"Did you get grub?" Stanley asked. "What was all the firing about?"

"We feared you had been killed," said the girl.

"No, I haven't got grub, yet," answered Bertie, "but I got this!"

He held up the nugget, and exclamations of surprise burst from the lips of his companions.

"You have found the cavern?" cried Stanley.

"Yes, and we have only got to lie low until the outlaws and the Apaches fight it out, and then we can play our little trump and scoop the pile."

"But meantime we shall starve," reminded Lenora.

"We must take our chances of that," said Bertie. "Here we are, and we have got to fight it out. But both parties had ample provisions, and we have got to outwit the Indians and secure some of it. And we can do it, with such a prize as a ton of gold at stake."

"What is that?"

A low, heavy, rumbling sound came to their ears.

The earth seemed to tremble, and they looked at one another with a feeling of awe.

"If it isn't an earthquake it is first cousin to one," declared Bertie.

The sound continued, growing louder and heavier each moment, until at last there came a heavy jolt and jar and it was over.

No more firing was heard, after that terrible sound had died away, and presently, hunger being the pressing exigency of the moment, Bertie proposed that they should cross the basin and investigate.

This they did, and Diamond Dick, Jr., conducted them cautiously up the narrow gorge in which the cavern and the ton of gold had been discovered. But he soon discovered that there was now no gorge there. A landslide had filled it almost level across.

It was a shock and a surprise, but there was the terrible fact. A space perhaps two hundred feet wide, reaching afar up the sloping mountain side, had been scooped out clean and denuded of everything movable, and the whole had been precipitated to the gorge below, burying alike outlaws and Indians under its terrible mass, and forever closing up the cave.

Thousands upon thousands of tons of *debris* now blocked the way to the treasure.

While the trio stood there, awestruck, they heard a moan.

Looking in the direction whence it came, they saw the head and shoulders of a man protruding from the mass of *debris* at one side.

"It is Dave Gibbons!" cried Lenora.

"And I will soon cut his life short," cried Stanley; but Bertie checked him.

"Hold!" he cried. "That man is worth two thousand dollars, and I will give him a fate worse than your bullet. Leave him to me."

"You say he is worth two thousand dollars to you?" cried Stanley, lowering his Winchester.

"How can that be?" queried Lenora.

"Because he is none other than Edward Andrews, the very man I came here in search of. Leave him to me, and if I am right I will see to it that he gets his just deserts, and that Henry Naylor is avenged."

"But," said Lenora, "I had vowed that a knife in my hand should find his heart. Think of what my brother suffered at his hands, sir."

"And it is for a greater punishment than a swift and sudden death that his life has been spared here," said Bertie, impressively. "Leave him to me, and while you are happy you can think of him as wearing out his life at hard labor in prison."

"Perhaps you are right," she said finally.

"And here, before we go farther," said Bertie, "I want you to accept this nugget. It is no doubt worth from thirteen to fifteen hundred dollars, and it will go toward providing you with a comfortable home. It is yours rather than mine, and I will accept no refusal. My own reward

will be ample when I land that rascal where he belongs."

It was accepted, and Bertie and Stanley then set about rescuing the helpless man from his living tomb. He was securely bound, as soon as his arms had been freed, and it was found that he had escaped without any broken bones. He was forced to tell where his horses and provisions had been left, and these were presently found. Further search likewise discovered the horses and supplies that had been brought there by Sierra Madre Jim and his men, and with all these the homeward journey was begun.

Nothing more was seen of either Indians or outlaws, and it was safe to conclude that all had perished miserably under the great landslide that had taken place. Bertie and his two friends reached the town of Tulip in safety, and when their story was told it made a sensation. The body of Henry Naylor had by that time been buried, and most of the men who had taken part in his hanging were sorry enough for the part they had played. There was a general exodus of undesirable characters, and Diamond Dick, Jr., was given an ovation by those citizens whose desire was to lead honest and law-abiding lives in the future.

Finally, Bertie took leave of them, taking his prisoner with him, whom he finally landed in prison, and for whose apprehension he received not only the promised reward, but great praise besides. His father heard of the matter, and wired him hearty congratulations. Bertie responded, and having another urgent call at once, he set forth for another single-handed adventure, the particulars of which will be given next week in a story entitled "Diamond Dick, Jr.'s Diamond Clew; or, The Duke of Pokeropolis."

[THE END.]

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